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NORTH DAKOTA POLITICS

Fargo Faces More Than Funding Fatigue From Legislature

By Tyler Axness Apr 02, 2019








The legislative session is about to enter its last stage with the appointment of conference committees to work out the differences between the chambers. This is when the battle over budgets usually intensifies. One of those repeated battles is the Fargo Diversion along with other Fargo related appropriations like long overdue upgrades at NDSU. Commentary has been presented trying to explain “**appropriators’ fatigue.**” One thing has been missing in others’ observations, pure politics and an anti-Fargo sentiment among some in the 2019 North Dakota Legislature.

Observers of North Dakota’s political past are familiar with the term “Imperial Cass County.” It seems that mentality has increased this legislative session in particular. Why? The perception in the ND House of partisan politics and the voting pattern of Fargo.

Some Republican Representatives have made it known in the Capitol hallways their anger at “Fargo” for defeating their former leader Al Carlson. Additionally, appropriators have reportedly made comments along the line of Fargo only electing liberals, specifically “liberal women.” The sentiment is “why should we do what Fargo wants?” It is a terrible way to govern.

First, a Republican woman ultimately defeated Al Carlson. I have no idea if Michelle Strinden considers herself a “liberal” or a “conservative” and we haven’t seen enough of her voting record. Secondly, there are still more Republicans than Democrats elected in Fargo and West Fargo. Within the metro, there are sixteen elected Republicans compared to eleven Democrats. That is not including the surrounding districts of Cass County which would increase the ratio of Republicans to Democrats. Sure, voting trends might be shifting further left but it isn’t reflected legislatively in 2019.

We also cannot ignore the **clear rift between some members of the House majority and Governor Doug Burgum.** Burgum is a Fargo guy and not entirely popular with the Republican-led Legislature. Rumored veto overrides may show that more clear before this session adjourns. Though it hasn’t been explicitly reported, it makes me curious if that tension builds into angst towards Fargo this session.

I’ll take this opportunity to remind readers that when western North Dakota needed state dollars for infrastructure and other resources during the oil boom, many eastern North Dakota lawmakers fought to get them more. Hell eastern Democrats -myself included – worked to make sure western counties could keep more of the revenue generated from their area instead of coming to Bismarck every session forced to beg for more from the majority. There was no political gamesmanship in mind, western North Dakota isn’t voting for Democrats. It was simply the right thing to do.

The thing is, this isn’t entirely an east versus west thing. There are legislators whose district includes Fargo that aren’t working in the best interest of their community. **Look no further than District 16.** Sen. David Clemens and Rep. Ben Koppelman have approached flood protection with a shoulder shrug. Clemens rejected repeal of the Sunday closing laws as a border community with major retailers in his district. Koppelman and Rep. Andrew Marshcall **rejected research funding for NDSU** to look into economic diversification for the state

sponsored by Fargo Republican Ron Sorvaag. That is just naming a few from this session. Good luck getting a rational explanation from these three.

Sure, fatigue from Fargo requests may be weighing on *some* appropriators. Yet, other partisan lawmakers are fed up with what their perception of Fargo politics is in 2019. That perception is playing an unspoken role in why they are attempting to withhold needed dollars for projects the metro area deems necessary.

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Tyler Axness

Tyler is a former North Dakota State Senator. He lays out the landscape of politics on the plains of North Dakota and the impact of national politics on the region. He talks about North Dakota politics, plain and simple.



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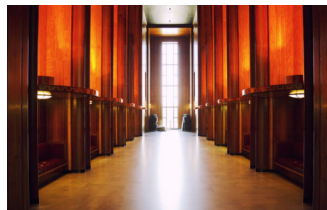
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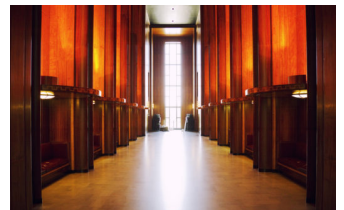
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